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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1987, the decision was made to discontinue the degree in speech communication (but retain the course offerings) within the department of communications at Linfield College, McMinnville, Oregon. A recently hired faculty member adopted nine strategies in an attempt to reestablish the degree program in speech communication. Actions taken as a result of those strategies included the following: (1) the status of the discipline within the department was improved; (2) the history of the program was investigated; (3) the decision was made to first attempt the reinstatement of the minor in speech communication; (4) members of the department in other disciplines (theater and mass communications) were persuaded, using informal dialogues, that human communication provides the link among the disciplines and that the speech communication program is central to the endeavors of the department; and (5) a formal proposal to reinstate the minor in speech communication was presented to the faculty near the end of the 1990 fall semester and to the college curriculum committee at the beginning of the fall 1991 semester. The proposal included a brief history of rhetoric, evidence supporting the need for education in speech communication from qualified sources outside the discipline; and brief descriptions of the range of issues studied within the discipline. On October 16, the curriculum committee formally approved the reinstatement of the minor in speech communication; final approval by the Faculty Assembly is pending. The process of gaining support for the reestablishment of speech communication suggests that those involved in the discipline need to do a better job of justifying their existence to the non-communication and non-academic worlds. (The proposal for reinstatement of the minor in speech communication is attached.) (RS)

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REESTABLISHING SPEECH COMMUNICATION AS A LEGITIMATE ACADEMIC PROGRAM IN A LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

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SmallCollege/University Section Panel
Defining the Role of a Communication Department in a Liberal Arts College

Speech Communication Association
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Reestablishing Speech Communication as a Legitimate Academic Program in a Liberal Arts College

In his new book, Classical Communication for the Contemporary Communicator, Halford Ryan notes that "the study of public speaking originated over 2300 years ago. This makes rhetoric one of the oldest of the liberal arts" (113). While most of us working within the discipline of communication accept this statement as self-evident, many outsiders are reluctant to acknowledge both the tradition and the validity of such a claim. Many of us feel we spend much of our time justifying the very existence of the discipline. Certainly this is evidenced by the existence of a national convention panel titled "Defining the Role of a Communication Department in a Liberal Arts College."

The purpose of this essay is to describe the on-going process of reestablishing speech communication as a legitimate academic program at Linfield College. This description includes a brief overview of the college, a discussion of the history of the discipline within the curriculum of the institution, and the strategies employed to justify the existence of the program within the Department of Communications and the institution.

Linfield College

Established in 1849, in Oregon City as the Oregon City College, Linfield soon moved to its current location in McMinnville and became the Baptist College in McMinnville. The college changed its name to Linfield in 1922 upon the receipt of a substantial gift from Frances Ross Linfield.

Linfield is a small institution with current enrollment on the main campus at 1428—the largest in the history of the institution. The college also operates the Linfield-Good Samaritan School of Nursing at the Good Samaritan Hospital and Medical Center in Portland. At this second campus, students may earn a B.S. in one of two majors—nursing or health science. Linfield reaches adult learners through its Division of Continuing Education. Through its international program, the Linfield campus extends beyond the borders of Oregon and the U.S. Each fall the college sends

students to study-abroad centers in Paris, France, Vienna, Austria, San José, Costa Rica, Yokohama, Japan, and Nottingham, England.

Although Linfield still maintains its ties to the American Baptist Church, the school is described as a liberal arts college as noted in the 1991-92 Linfield College Bulletin:

> Linfield is a liberal arts college. The curriculum seeks to overcome intellectual provincialism, underscores the centrality of how one learns, provides an historical context, relates ideas to social structures, and affirms the importance of values in human life. The liberal arts curriculum is coherent and useful when it prepares students to seek knowledge and improve skills throughout their lives. (10)

History of the Speech Communication Program at Linfield

Both organized forensic activity and training in public speaking have been included in the curriculum of Linfield College since 1880 (Mahaffey 125). According to Mahaffey, one of the first listings of a required course in speech was found in the catalog of 1896-97. Students were required to complete four years of the one credit course titled "Elocution and Physical Culture" (127). By 1927, curricular offerings in speech were expanded greatly, speech fundamentals had become a graduation requirement and steps were taken to offer a speech major (Mahaffey 136). A dramatics club was organized in 1917 and courses in drama followed in 1923. By the early 1930s, "thirteen different courses in speech and drama with a total of 31-1/2 semester credit hours were given for the speech students. There were three faculty committees provided for the activities: Dramatics, Oratory and Debate, and Radio" (Mahaffey 138). The program appears to have continued its expansion in all three of these areas through the decades of the fifties and sixties.

The current Department of Communications was created in the early seventies. Students were given the opportunity to pursue a single integrated major in communications with the possibility of obtaining an emphasis in one of the program areas including speech, speech education, theatre, and mass communications. Three distinct majors were implemented in 1983, including a major, dual major, and minor in speech communication. In the spring of 1987, the decision was made to drop, "at

least temporarily, the speech major, which had not attracted a significant number of students" (Self Study, 135). Although the degree in speech communication was discontinued, the course offerings were retained.

The status of the Speech Communication Program within the Department of Communications and the college has been in question since 1987. The following sections of the paper describe the process of reestablishing the program as a legitimate academic discipline.

Speech Communication and the Department of Communications

I joined the faculty of Linfield College in the fall of 1987. At this time the college was completing the final phases of an accreditation self-study. In the Self Study Report published in 1988, the goal of the Department of Communications was described in the following manner:

> . . . to develop liberally-educated men and women who understand the vital role of the written and spoken symbol as they adapt to and challenge their environments, and who can express themselves accurately, clearly grammatically, creatively, and persuasively. (129)

In the same document, the theatre and mass communications programs were portrayed as pre-professional programs that provide "models of how such programs can complement and promote liberal arts values at the same time they enhance career choices for students" (142). This characterization of the programs continued in the following statement:

> We see theatre as the crucial creative junction of all the liberal arts, and our classroom emphasis on the liberal arts as the unifying basis of all learning is what distinguishes our mass communications program from technical education. The mass communications and theatre majors provide professional career choices for our students solidly within the liberal arts framework. (142)

The difficulties encountered in characterizing the speech program—"a program in a transitional period" were explained in the accreditation document. The Self-Study Report stated that the "departmental objectives for the [speech] program are not entirely clear" (141). The

narrative included the following statement as well. "Because speech at the undergraduate level is not a pre-professional but what might be termed a liberal program, it is difficult to measure in concrete terms its contribution to the realization of departmental goals" (143). On the other hand, the same document reported that the administration viewed the mission of the program as service in terms of providing "basic courses in oral communication to the college" and offering "a vital forensics activity to interested students" (141).

The Self-Study Report was published a few months after my arrival at Linfield. Although the decision to discontinue the degree program in speech had been made clear during the interview process, the discussions did not prepare me for the statements contained in the report. The lack of understanding of the role of a discipline within its own department coupled with the relegation of a viable academic program to the status of "service to others only" placed the discipline and the faculty (especially new faculty) teaching within it in an unenviable position. After preliminary investigation into the circumstances surrounding the decision to drop the degree program, I decided efforts to reinstate some aspect of the program were warranted. This decision was reinforced through discussions with students who indicated interest in pursuing majors or minors in the area. The following strategies have been employed in the attempts to reestablish the program.

First, it was obvious that the status of the discipline within the Department had to be improved before any proposal could be forwarded to the larger community. It also became apparent that resistance to the degree program came primarily from one member of the department. Second, given the immediacy of the decision to redirect the speech program, the attitude of one faculty member toward the program and my status as newcomer, I knew the process would be slow. Therefore, I thought it wise to adopt the attitude of the tortoise rather than that of the hare.

Third, although I did not wish to base my arguments on unwarranted appeals to tradition, I thought it important to acquaint myself with the history of the program. This idea was reinforced as I learned more about the reputation of the program, especially the national acclaim received by the forensics program under the direction of Roy Mahaffey, and as I met more and more colleagues who were graduates of the earlier programs in speech. Fourth, due to limited faculty resources

within the discipline (one full-time faculty member and a second faculty member who devotes two-fifths of his load to the program), the need to insure the integrity of the program as well as the administration's desire and the department's commitment to continue offering service courses and to maintain an active forensics program, it became obvious that any short-term attempt to reinstate the major in speech would be doomed to failure. Therefore, the decision was made to work toward the reestablishment of the minor in speech communication.

Fifth, it was obvious that my own credibility as a scholar within the discipline as well as the intellectual rigor of the speech courses would be an issue in any discussion of the reinstatement of the program. The completion of the Ph.D. degree in 1988, subsequent professional activity, and student and colleague evaluations have contributed to the development of personal credibility. In terms of the courses, efforts have been made to emphasize the theoretical and intellectual facets of the discipline in all of the courses, especially those often referred to as "the blow-off skills courses." This attempt to emphasize the scholarly features of the discipline has been evident in the editing of course descriptions for the proposal presented to the department and subsequently to the college curriculum committee.

The sixth strategy adopted in the campaign involved the use of informal dialogue. Again, it was obvious that any formal, written presentation would be viewed as confrontational and would meet with limited success at best. Hence, for more than two years, I took advantage of every opportunity to illustrate that each of the other disciplines included in the department—theatre and mass communications—focuses to some degree on some aspect of human communication. For example, the rehearsal process in theatre occurs through the medium of interpersonal and small group communication. The theatrical performance is a form of public communication. Journalists in both print and broadcast media spend much of their time interviewing sources, that is, they engage in interpersonal communication. These arguments and others were presented in informal dialogue (oral and written) to persuade the members of the department that it is this mutual concern with human communication that provides the link among the disciplines and that the speech communication program is central to the endeavors of the department.

The seventh strategy focused on more formal and explicit dialogue regarding the reinstatement of the minor. This phase of the campaign involved networking with individual members of the department faculty. Eventually, the idea was discussed in more formal departmental meetings. Once the department appeared to offer some support for the reinstatement of the program, the next task (the eighth strategy) was to create a workable program that would enhance the integrity of the discipline, provide students with a coherent body of knowledge, allow continued service course offerings and support a forensics program.

Finally, a formal proposal to reinstate the minor in speech communication was presented to the department faculty near the end of the 1990 fall semester. The formal proposal included the ninth strategy, that is, a refutation of the argument that there was insufficient student interest in the speech program. It became apparent that the mass communications program recruited the largest number of majors and minors. However, there had been comparable numbers of students pursuing degrees in theatre and speech. Since I did not wish to undermine the degree program in theatre, this argument presented many challenges. I made the decision to include information regarding numbers of majors in a proposal that would be submitted to department members only. The following information was presented in that proposal.

> According to records obtained from the Registrar as well as departmental records, during the first four years the three majors were offered (1983 to 1987), 24 students completed degree work in mass communications, 8 in theatre, and 8 in speech communication. In the same time period, 56 students finished degrees under the unified "communications" degree. While there is no question that more students were completing work in mass communications than in theatre or speech, the number of students receiving degrees in speech and in theatre during the time period is identical. In 1988, 25 students completed degree work in mass communications, 4 received degrees in theatre and 9 completed work in speech communication. In 1989, 19 students received degrees in mass communications compared with 1 in theatre and 2 in speech communication. In 1990, three

students will complete work in speech communication. A fourth student attempted to complete a minor but was unable to because of course offerings and schedule conflicts with required courses in his major. Since the degree was discontinued, 14 students have completed work in speech communication. In addition, information in the "grapevine" indicates that 10-12 students dropped the program between the spring of 1987 and the fall of 1987 because they were told they would be unable to complete degrees in the area. Additional information in the same grapevine suggests that during the last two years of his tenure (half of the time period during which the speech communication degree was offered), the previous full-time faculty member in the area did not work to support the program and may, in fact, have discouraged students from pursuing degrees in speech communication. Since 1988, at least 20 current and prospective students have indicated an interest in pursuing degrees in speech communication.

Based on the preceding information, hindsight suggests that the decision to drop the speech communication degree based on student interest may have been premature.

During the 1991 spring semester, the proposal to reinstate the minor in speech communication was endorsed by all members of the Department of Communications. I then began work to formalize a proposal to submit to the college curriculum committee. The strategies involved in this endeavor are detailed in the following section.

Speech Communication and the Liberal Arts College

The statements included in the 1988 Self-Study Report did have one positive aspect—they supported the notion that speech communication is a liberal art. This idea was the focus of the proposal submitted to the curriculum committee. Three strategies were used to reinforce this concept. First, a brief history of rhetoric, including the role of rhetoric in the development of the

liberal arts concept, was included in the proposal. Much of this information was gathered from sources within the discipline. To avoid perceptions of bias, the proposal included evidence supporting the need for education in speech communication from qualified sources outside the discipline. Third, brief descriptions of the range of issues studied within the discipline, as well as the perspectives that ground those issues, were presented to support the idea that speech communication involves more than the basic service courses in public speaking and interpersonal communication.

As indicated in the previous discussion, it was important to present a proposal for a workable program that would enhance the integrity of the discipline, provide students with a coherent body of knowledge, allow continued service course offerings and support a forensics program. A copy of the proposal submitted to the curriculum committee is included in the appendix.

The proposal was submitted at the beginning of the 1991 fall semester. Questions regarding the validity of the program or the role of the program within the Department of Communications or a liberal arts college did not emerge from the committee deliberations. The committee was concerned with the impact the minor program would have on the offering of service courses, specifically, public speaking and interpersonal communication. These questions indicated a need to reinforce the ideas that speech communication involves more than these two basic courses and that other courses (such as argumentation, intercultural communication, oral interpretation, etc.) offered at the 100 and 200 levels are legitimate service courses as well. Two additional documents with arguments supporting these viewpoints were presented to the committee. On October 16, the curriculum committee formally approved the reinstatement of the minor in speech communication. The proposal will be submitted to the Faculty Assembly for final approval on Monday, November 4.

The process of gaining support for the reestablishment of speech communication as a legitimate academic discipline at Linfield College has been a learning experience. Several important issues emerge from the process. First, it is important to practice what we preach. That is, careful attention to audience analysis, construction of valid arguments supported with sound evidence and use of carefully planned and executed rhetorical strategies are important tools to use as we work to

justify the discipline. Second, there is a wealth of credible evidence from scholars within the discipline supporting the concept that speech communication is a liberal art as well as the need for students to be exposed to the knowledge and skills explored in speech communication courses. However, we need more evidence to support these arguments from credible sources outside the discipline. Perhaps those of us involved in the discipline need to do a better job of justifying our existence to the non-communication and non-academic worlds—perhaps we really do need to embrace the theme of this conference and reach out to other communities.

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APPENDIX

LINFIELD COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS

SPEECH COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

PROPOSAL FOR MINOR IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION

Rationale for Reinstating the Minor in Speech Communication

Speech Communication and the Liberal Arts

"The study of speech communication has its own history and has earned a significant place in the global world of scholarship" (Arnold, 324). Rhetoric, or speech communication, was considered a part of the seven liberal arts and "can be traced back to the *enkyklios paideia,* or comprehensive education of Greek thinkers" (Kennedy, 175). During the Middle Ages, rhetoric was one of the subjects included in the *trivium* and it played a central role in the curricula of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment (Hostettler, 332). From the colonial period until the present, rhetoric has been an important subject for study in American colleges and universities (Bormann, 5). As Bormann notes:

> The study of communication has had a long, varied, and sometimes honorable tradition in western culture. The scholars of classical Greece and Rome studied rhetoric intensively, and from that time until the present the process of how one person communicates with others has been a topic of fascination—in some historical periods more than others, to be sure, but never has the study of communication ebbed to insignificance. History thus gives us a complex and detailed account of human efforts to discover the nature, essence, and dynamics of communication. (3)

The inclusion of rhetoric as a subject of study within the traditional liberal arts context is evident. The following discussion addresses the validity of this tradition by focusing on the contributions the discipline of speech communication makes to the liberal education of students. Hostettler includes the following points in his defense of speech communication as a liberal study.

> It is the ability to symbolize, to speak and to write, which makes us human and makes human society possible; therefore, to understand speech is "to understand the essence of our humanity." . . . The study of speech communication includes broad areas of knowledge and involves a great deal more than mere "skill"; but even if it did not, ability in speech is essential for meaningful participation of liberally educated persons in democratic society. . . . Truth must be made effective in a free society, and to this goal speech can and does make a major contribution. . . . Modern speech communication instruction in the classical tradition insists upon significant subject matter, rigorous intellectual application, high ethical standards, responsible communication, and the subordination of technique to ideas in speeches. Speech communication, thus conceived and taught, is liberal in aim and spirit. (346)

Dance suggests that speech communication is "one of the foundations of a liberal education and is a basic requirement of all programs which intend to produce a liberally educated human and humane being" (331). This argument is supported by the following statements.

> Concentrated study of how spoken language interacts with thought assists the student both in conceptualization and in expression. Study of the techniques of public speaking helps the student to develop mental agility as well as spoken facility. Argumentation and debate, when studied both as theory and as practice, exalts acuity of thought as well as the presentation and defense of cases. The study of literary texts as a means of teasing out their meaning so as to provide the best spoken expression develops an interpretative skill that enhances the understanding of student both as speaker and as listener. The study of persuasion helps the student to analyze the sources of conflict as well as some means for the resolution of honest differences. The utilization of the phenomenological method and the phenomenological stance for the study of spoken language, when joined with traditional methodological approaches, helps to uncover the basic processes of human communication. An understanding of the functions of spoken language aids the student in developing

> uniquely human social linkages, the development of higher mental processes, and the use of spoken language as a regulator of human behavior. (330-331)

Many outside of the discipline also recognize the importance of oral communication skills. Derek Bok, former President of Harvard states that "the ability to communicate orally and in writing with clarity and style" is an obvious intellectual skill that "will serve students well in almost any problem or career in which they happen to engage" (163-164). Numerous reports on education generated in the decade of the eighties conclude that competence in communication is a requisite skill. The members of the various groups responsible for these documents from A Nation at Risk to The Paideia Proposal to the "New Report on Excellence in Undergraduate Education" note that the specific skills involved in oral communication, speaking, listening, and thinking, are essential competencies.

In his book, Communication and the Human Condition, W. Barnett Pearce discusses two views of human communication.

> The traditional concept of communication holds that "we" exist in a material world, and we use communication to express our "inner" purposes, attitudes, or feelings, and to describe the events and objects of the external world. Communication works well to the extent that it accurately expresses (or, when used by a cad, strategically distorts) inner feelings or external reality, and when it produces understanding or deliberate misunderstanding between the speaker and the audience(s) addressed.
>
> The alternative view is that "we" consist of a cluster of social conversations, and that these patterns of communication constitute the world as we know it. In this view, communication is a *primary* social process, the material substance of those things whose reality we often take for granted, such as our "selves," motives, relationships, what we would otherwise describe as "facts," and so forth. The forms of communication in which we participate either liberate or enslave us; they facilitate or subvert human values. (11)

Contemporary scholarship and teaching in the discipline of speech communication addresses both of these views. That is, the members of the discipline strive to enhance the skills described above

to enable humans to function more effectively in the day to day activities of the material or practical world characterized in the first view while simultaneously exploring the theoretical and practical implications of the second view in an effort to better understand the "the essence of our humanity."

Speech Communication at Linfield College

Both organized forensic activity and training in public speaking have been included in the curriculum of Linfield College since the 1880s (Mahaffey, 125). According to Mahaffey, by 1927 curricular offerings in speech were expanded greatly, speech fundamentals had become a graduation requirement and steps were taken to offer a speech major (136). The expansion of the program continued through the decades of the fifties and sixties as additional course work in theatre and radio was included in the curriculum.

In the early seventies, the various disciplines were merged to create the current departmental structure. Students were given the opportunity to pursue a major in communications with the possibility of obtaining an emphasis in one of the program areas including speech and a teaching major in speech. Three distinct majors were implemented in 1983, including a major, dual major, and minor in speech communication. In 1987, the decision was made to drop, "at least temporarily, the speech major, which had not attracted a significant number of students" (Self Study, 135).

The information in the following table indicates the numbers of students completing degree work (major, dual major, or minor) in speech communication from 1987 - 1990.

YEAR OF GRADUATION	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
1987	8
1988	9
1989	2
1990	3

In 1990, a fourth student attempted to complete a minor but was unsuccessful due to the rotation of course offerings and schedule conflicts with required courses in his major. We may assume that

the eight students completing degrees in 1987, began the program between 1983 and 1987. Since the degree was discontinued in the fall of 1987, 14 students have completed work in speech communication. In addition, information in the "grapevine" indicates that 10-12 students dropped the program between the spring of 1987 and the fall of 1987 because they were told they would be unable to complete degrees in the area. Since 1988, at least 20 former, current and prospective students have indicated an interest in pursuing a minor or major in speech communication.

This preceding discussion could be used to argue for the reinstatement of the major in speech communication as well as the minor. The following explanation outlines the reasons for the decision to focus on the minor rather than the major.

At this time, only one full-time faculty member teaches within the speech communication discipline. A second faculty member devotes two-fifths of his load to the program. In our opinion, at least two full-time faculty members are needed in the program to insure the integrity of a major. The reinstatement of the minor would allow the faculty members in the area to rebuild interest in the discipline.

Another reason for discontinuing the degree program focused on the need to meet the desire to continue the forensics activity. The impossibility of maintaining a major in the discipline while supporting an active forensics program with current faculty resources is acknowledged. However, given those resources and current policies, the reinstatement of the minor can be accomplished without discontinuing the forensics program.

The arguments presented in the preceding discussion illustrate that the speech communication program contributes directly and centrally to the recognized goals of a liberal arts education. Within the perspective of the traditional concept of communication described by Pearce, the program does provide a "service oriented" education to students in all disciplines as well as to those students specifically interested in the study of human communication. At the same time, the program is a product of a vigorous and viable academic discipline. Students interested in gaining more knowledge about both views of communication illustrated by Pearce should have an

opportunity to pursue an organized curriculum within the discipline. Therefore, we request the reinstatement of the minor in speech communication.

The Minor Program

The speech communication minor will consist of 21 hours of course work in the discipline. The details of the program are listed below. The minor parallels the degree offered from 1983-1987, with the addition of required work in forensics and oral interpretation.

Courses Required for the Minor (21 Hours)

SPEECH 130	(3)	Interpersonal Communication
SPEECH 140	(2)	Public Speaking
SPEECH 146	(1)	Intercollegiate Forensics
SPEECH 220	(3)	Oral Interpretation of Literature
SPEECH 240	(3)	Argumentation OR
SPEECH 340		Persuasion
SPEECH 355	(3)	American Public Address OR
SPEECH 455		Rhetorical Theory and Criticism
SPEECH 475	(3)	Organizational Communication
SPEECH	(3)	Speech Course to be selected by student

Additional course offered in the Speech Communication Program:
Speech 230—Intercultural Communication

Total Courses to be Offered in the Speech Communication Program

10 Courses [Note: 046 and 146 Intercollegiate Forensics have been counted as one course.]

27 Credit Hours [Note: 046 and 146 Intercollegiate Forensics have been counted as one credit.]